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ANTONI GAUDÍ AND THE DRAGON-BICORNE

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Synopsis This contribution argues that the well-known dragon atop Casa Batlló also represents a gigantic and caricatured bicorne hat, intended to ridicule the pretentiousness of the Antichrist's pulpit-balcony below.

Keywords Antoni Gaudí; Casa Batlló; Jean-Leon Gérôme; Domenico Petarlini; Paul Delaroche.

Cover image Antoni Gaudí, photo by Pau Audouard [wikimedia.org].

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In contrast to the melancholy or even reserved severity of Antoni Gaudí's portraits, his creations immediately stand out for their exceptional energy and vivacity, in which he combined visual quotations from the natural and cultural landscape of his native Catalonia – brilliant glimpses of the infinite and unbeatable fantasy of the true good Creator[1].

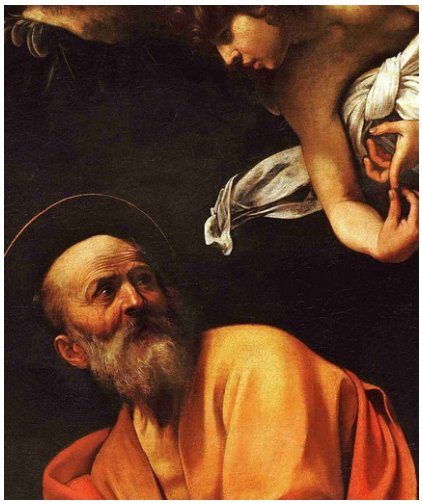
This artistic-allegorical connection between the earthly dimension and the desired divine glory is, however, inevitably accompanied by an evil presence that disguises itself in an attempt to mislead mankind.

To denounce the presence of these forces, Gaudí concealed diabolical-caricatured forms as a way to challenge the perspicacity and caution of the viewer, devices which, moreover, have a long artistic tradition[2].

1 In a way, this logic is reminiscent of how, in the Gothic monastery of Batalha, the architect Mateus Fernandes was buried in the floor of the entrance next to his wife (≈ Adam and Eve), in longitudinal symmetry with the high altar and the true Architect.

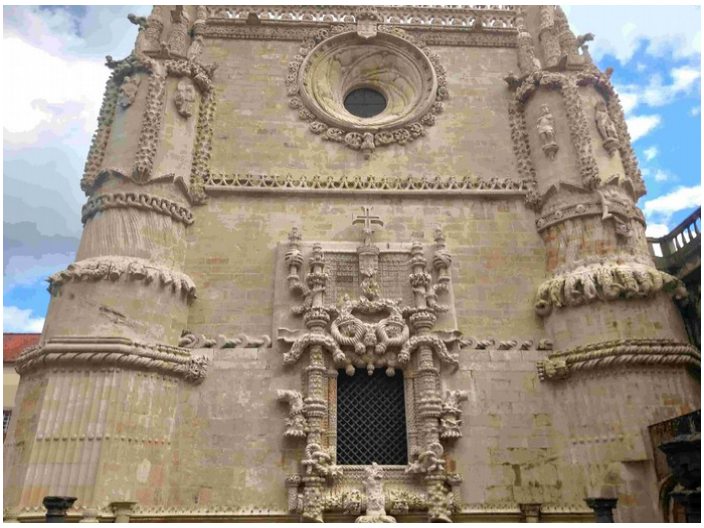
2 See in this regard some examples relating to Caravaggio: *The deceptive angels*, 2013, pp.2-4, coll. in *Shared devices in European Art. Studies 2012-2015*, pp.29-32 [archive.org]; *Octógono* extra number (25) / Jan.13, 2026 – "On Caravaggio's storytelling" [academia.edu | archive.org], coll. in *Terceiro Octógono*, pp.191-194 [academia.edu | archive.org]; and *Caravaggio's cliffhangers – The case of St. Matthew* [video: archive.org | commons.org | youtube.com]. See also *Bosch and the hidden devils of the Garden*, 2013, p.6 [academia.edu], coll. in *Northern Art. Studies 2012-2016*, pp.91-98 [archive.org].

Examples



Titian, *Pesaro Madona*, det., Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari [wikimedia.org].
Caravaggio, *The inspiration of St. Matthew*, det., San Luigi dei Francesi [wikimedia.org].
Two examples of individuals being deceived or distracted by diabolical faces modeled in fabric folds.

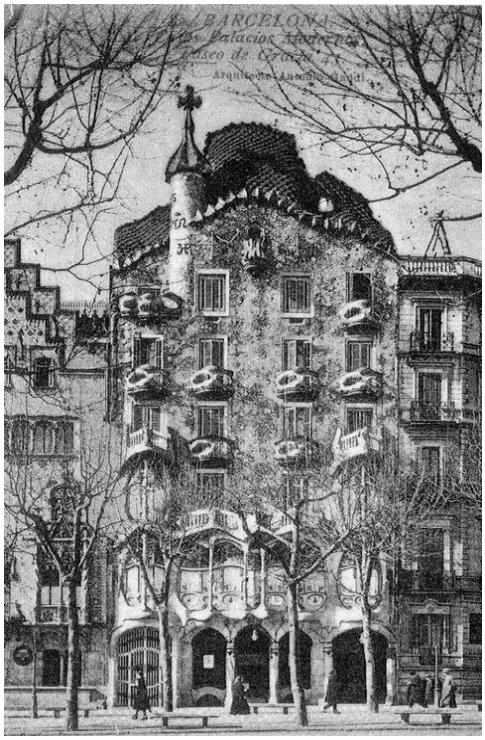
The same principle can be verified in architecture, as illustrated below with a 16th-century example[3].



Diogo de Arruda and Gil Vicente, Convent of Christ, western wall, Tomar [PMO].
In this case, the path to spiritual salvation is the oculus at the top, not the polysemous window below, which symbolizes the curtain that concealed and mystified the monarch's body from his subjects. Discreetly, and playing with the ambiguity of double meanings, this window also suggests the sarcastic mouth of a large demonic face that compels mere mortals to humility (starting with those supposedly most powerful).

3 With regard to this example, see the relevant context and some comparative examples in *Octógono* n.23 / Jan. 2026 – "O horrendo portal manuelino da Golegã". p.13 [academia.edu | archive.org].

It is therefore within this tradition of Christian art that Gaudí, as is well known, camouflaged a dragon (*drac*) in the roof of Casa Batlló[4].



Facade of the Casa Batlló in an early 20th-century postcard [wikimedia.org].
Contemporary perspective of the same building [wikimedia.org/ChristianSchd].

Coat of arms of the City of Barcelona (17th-18th centuries) [wikimedia.org].
Coat of arms of the City of Barcelona (c.1870-1931 / 1939-1984) [wikimedia.org].
The city's patron saint (St. George, Sant Jordi) defeated evil, a symbol of which appears heraldically imprisoned in the city's coat of arms (≈ heraldic gargoyle).

4 As is also known, the subsidiary bat is similarly suggested (more discreetly) in the lower part of the facade.

However, Gaudí designed his creature not only to allegorize evil in the abstract, but also to address the pernicious great powers of morally small men.

Thus, the analysis of that element is itemized as follows:

• The dragon's design alludes to Napoleon Bonaparte's famous and iconic bicorne hat.

Uniform of Napoleon, Chateau of Fontainebleau [wikimedia.org/SiefkinDR].
Édouard Detaille, *Napoleon in 1806*, Musée de l'Armée [wikimedia.org].

• The conspicuous Gaudi's draconian bicorne hat ridicules and belittles anyone who might appear on the small balcony below.

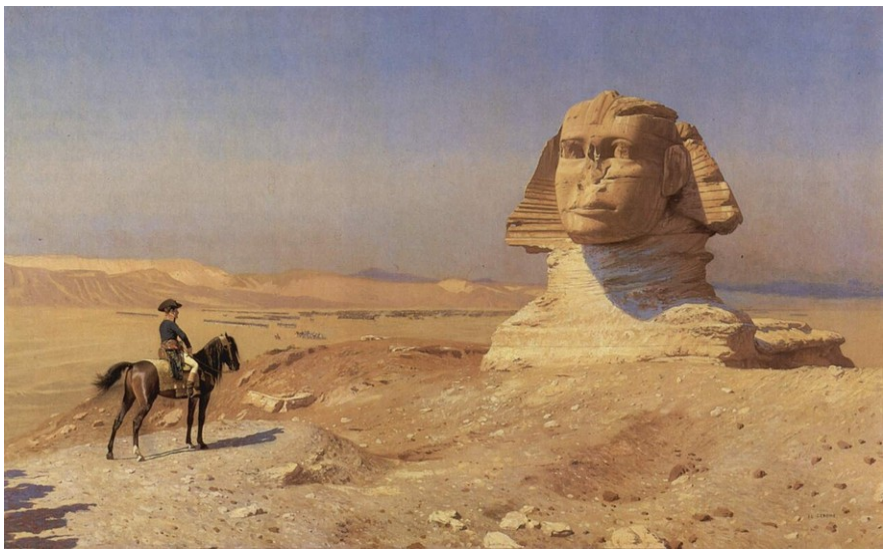
Casa Batlló, det. [wikimedia.org/BernardGagnon].

• In this way, each spectator on the street would have to imagine the pretentious, comical speech or exhortation being delivered from there (≈ diabolical pulpit of the Antichrist, allegorizing all "Napoleons" of the past, present and future).

Examples

Well Child you shall have it, but I dont think you'll be a bit better for it nor quieter when you've got it.
I will have it I will, or else I'll cry give me the Crown
CRYING for a NEW TOY.

Isaac Cruikshank, caricature of a childish Napoleon with a large bicorne hat, 1803 [wikimedia.org].
Note: feather ≈ tower at Casa Batlló.



Jean-Leon Gérôme, *Bonaparte before the Sphinx*, San Simeon [wikimedia.org].
In this encounter of "bicorne hats", the artist satirized the pettiness of individual ambitions in the face of the great millennia-old History (even if partially buried, i.e., largely unknown).

• Despite being destined for irrelevance in the grand scheme of things, Napoleon nevertheless remained very present in the recent collective memory due to his traumatic campaigns, military occupations, and interference in the lives of different countries and peoples.

Example

Caricature from 1819. The destabilizing axis is occupied by Napoleon, who, even though exiled on the island of Saint Helena, remained a potential and latent danger [wikimedia.org/BritishMuseum].

• In fact, even after his death, Napoleon would remain omnipresent throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries (then outdated by the World Wars).

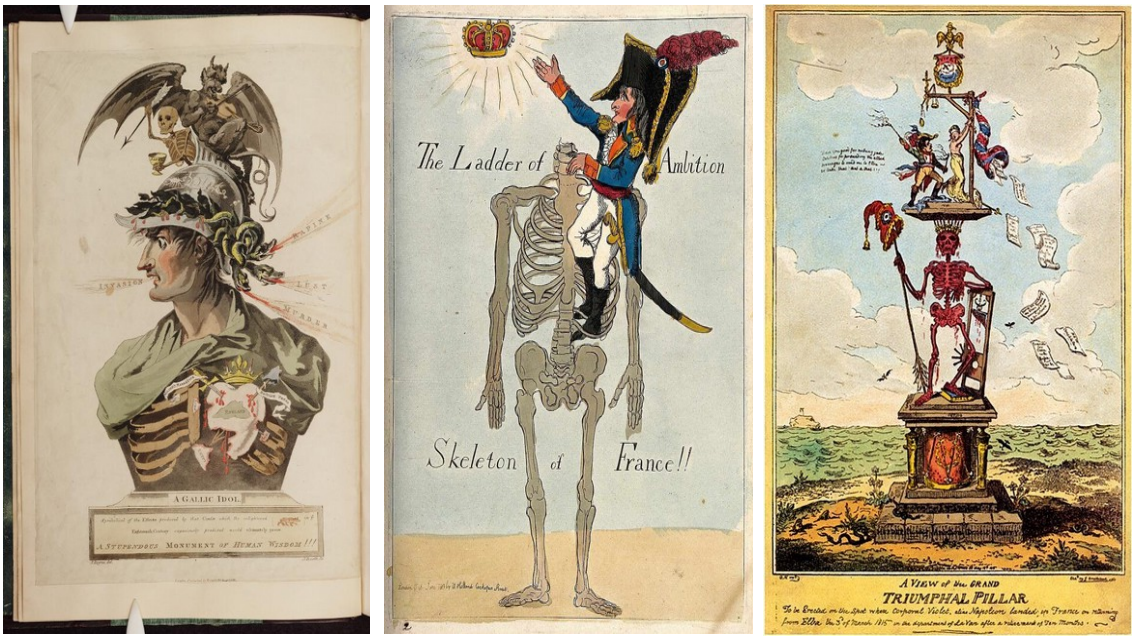
• For example, in the first of the 19th-century paintings shown below, Petarlini merged his exiled Dante with the defeated Napoleon previously depicted by Delaroche.

Domenico Petarlini, *Dante in exile*, det., Palazzo Chiericati [wikimedia.org].

Paul Delaroche, *Napoleon at Fontainebleau*, det., Royal Colection [wikimedia.org].

- Intellectuals of the 19th/20th centuries maintained a fascination with Napoleon, as he was a "Shakespearean" character who initially promised much in terms of promoting and protecting universal rights and freedoms across Europe, but succumbed to the demon of ambition, ending up bringing only death and destruction on a large scale (thus disappointing the expectations of figures such as Francisco de Goya, Domingos Sequeira and Ludwig van Beethoven, among others).

Examples



Three caricatures of ambitious Napoleon as Lord of Death, early 19th century. [wikimedia.org/BodleianLibraries] [wikimedia.org/WelcomeTrust] [wikimedia.org].

- Gaudí adapted this idea of a skeleton and Napoleonic cemetery or ossuary(≈ Battle, Batalla).

Casa Batlló, det. [wikimedia.org/CaryBass].

• In this nefarious dynamic, Gaudí depicted how hate generates hate, suggesting the image of eggs of evil from which small diabolical creatures emerge and ascend (in the form of "skullish" balconies, being subordinate to to the upper pulpit-balcony).

Casa Batlló [wikimedia.org/Amadalvarez].

• Essentially, it refers to the idea of serpent (≈ dragon) eggs, introduced by William Shakespeare to refer to Julius Caesar (≈ Napoleon), altough a similar concept had already been used by Jheronimus Bosch in his concealed satires aimed at the imperial Habsburgs as instruments and supporters of the Antichrist[5].

Jheronimus Bosch, *Tempations of St, Anthony*, det., MNAA [PMO].
In this large, broken egg turned into a chapel of ease, the Antichrist attracts and deceives.

5 For more on this issue, see "The egg of Bosch", in *Separata 1*, 2012, pp.7-16 [academia.edu | archive.org]; coll. in *Northern Art. Studies 2012-2016*, pp.23-32 [archive.org]; *Octógono* extra number (17) / Oct.3, 2025 – "The Antonine camera obscura of Jheronimus Bosch" [academia.edu | archive.org], coll. in *Terceiro Octógono*, pp.159-160 [academia.edu | archive.org].

Example

A cartoon depicting the creatures generated by Napoleon to interfere in other countries (in this case, Switzerland) [wikimedia.org].

- However, it will be inevitable that envious evil will turn against itself, with malevolent allies beginning to betray and cannibalize one another.

Example

Pieter Bruegel, *Big fish eat little fish*, Gal. Albertina [wikimedia.org/GoogleArtProject]. Associated with the Tower of Babel, this satire allegorizes the collapse of powers based on voracious ambition.

• For this reason, Gaudí´s dragon is thrust from the heavens (symbolic effect of the shadow on the roof), but also harpooned from below, by its own treacherous allies.

A call for resistance against Napoleon-Dragon (also a serpen and a bat), det., 1803 [wikimedia.org/BodleianLibraries].
The tower as a harpoon, Casa Batlló, det. [wikimedia.org/BernardGagnon].

• However, evil does not simply dissipate in this self-destructive process, as its implosion will cause shockwaves with devastating effects on the already affected society...

In short, Casa Batlló is also an intellectual construct, which embodies the famous phrase "Power tends to corrupt, and absolut power corrupts absolutely in such a manner that great men are almost always bad men" (John Dalberg-Acton, 1887).

Thus, Antoni Gaudí evokes aspects deeply rooted in the mind, whether in the individual or in the community as a whole. And in this matter, the architect manages to be even more surprising.